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Web link to an itinerary: BUSINESS TRAVEL COMPUTER RESERVATIONS: Bypassing computer reservation systems may reduce customer frustrations over bookings, says Kate Rice:[London edition]

Rice, Kate. Financial Times. London: Aug 30, 1999. pg. 08

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Abstract (Article Summary)

For business travellers who use Oracle's eT-Link, a direct web-based link between companies and travel suppliers, such frustrations may become less frequent.

In contrast with CRSs' text-based technology, eT-Link can deliver full-feature, multi-video capability to the business traveller. Thus, the traveller who uses Hertz, one of the suppliers available through eT-Link, can view images showing the difference between a Chevy Lumina and a Ford Taurus.

For instance, a traveller might find the Sheraton he or she intended to stay in was booked. Right now, according to Rick Lifitz, vice-president of product management for Oracle, the only information that automatically comes on-screen on a CRS is the fact that there are no vacancies at the Sheraton. But, since Sheraton is owned by the same company that owns Westin, eT-Link can offer the customer a room at the Westin two blocks away for about the same price.

Full Text (716 words)

Copyright F.T. Business Enterprises Limited (FTBE) Aug 30, 1999

Have you ever booked a rental car for \$39 (£24) a day and ended up paying double that, thanks to airport surcharges, local taxes and vehicle licensing fees not mentioned when booking?

For business travellers who use [Oracle's eT-Link](#), a direct web-based link between companies and travel suppliers, such frustrations may become less frequent.

The technology allows purchasers to bypass computer **reservation** systems which were designed to sell **airline** seats and are of limited use when looking for more complicated products such as **hotels** and **car** rentals.

It also means travel suppliers can avoid what they consider to be onerous computer reservation system fees.

In contrast with CRSs' text-based technology, eT-Link can deliver full-feature, multi-video capability to the business traveller. Thus, the traveller who uses [Hertz](#), one of the suppliers available through eT-Link, can view images showing the difference between a Chevy Lumina and a Ford Taurus.

Not only does it calculate the total cost, including all those extra fees, it also recognises the customer (nice if you're a Gold level member) and confirms extras such as mobile phone rentals.

"From a user standpoint, you get a heck of a lot more intelligent information," says Valerie Cordell, director of corporate travel at [Oracle](#), which as well as owning eT-Link uses it for its own travel arrangements.

"It will substantially reduce the complaints about rates we get with [Hertz](#) because people don't understand about various charges that are sometimes out of their control, particularly on taxes and surcharges in cities like New York and Boston." eT-Link's greatest strength may be its partnership with Pegasus, the company that includes most of the world's big hotel chains and has amassed an impressive hotel **database** independent of computer reservation systems.

For instance, a traveller might find the Sheraton he or she intended to stay in was booked. Right now, according to Rick Lifitz, vice-president of product management for [Oracle](#), the only information that automatically comes on-screen on a CRS is the fact that there are no vacancies at the Sheraton. But, since [Sheraton](#) is owned by the same company that owns Westin, eT-Link can offer the customer a room at the Westin two blocks away for about the same price.

If the corporate client has negotiated guaranteed room availability, eT-Link makes that process automatic. eT-Link also contains maps showing a hotel's location and a complete list of amenities, something difficult to do within a CRS.

With international flight bookings, e-Travel can show travellers the difference between the First Class and Business Class cabin - a function that airlines are intensely interested in, according to Mr Lifitz.

Travellers do not have to do anything special to use eT-Link - the service is designed to be part of [Oracle's](#) automated booking tool, and is transparent to the end user - what the user sees on-screen is similar to what he or she would see on any travel **web** site: graphics and point-and-click technology.

Company travel policy is built in, and the system lists suppliers with which companies have negotiated preferred agreements. eT-Link also offers direct links to Continental Airlines and [Amtrak](#) and is negotiating with other travel suppliers.

However, direct connections such as eT-Link or [Andersen Consulting's Via Worldwide Networks](#), may never replace computer reservation systems. For one thing, CRSs provide a huge amount of information in a marketplace where suppliers and buyers meet.

While eT-Link charges only \$1-\$2 for connecting suppliers with customers - much less than a CRS fee - travel managers will want to be sure its distribution model is effective.

Another potential problem with bypassing a CRS is the question of whether a travel agent can pull up a business traveller's full itinerary if something goes wrong.

Nevertheless, the threat of eT-Link is enough to make computer reservation systems consider the prospect of altering their pricing.

"Right now it's sort of a novelty and something that the CRSs aren't going to re-engineer themselves to compensate for," says Scott Smith, vice-president of sales and marketing for Sabre BTS, the business travel services arm of a CRS that began as a division of American Airlines.

"But if it becomes big enough, you can bet that all of us can figure out a way to be compensated for the services we provide." Copyright Financial Times Limited 1999. All Rights Reserved.

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